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WORKSHOP ON CAPACITY BUILDING
FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF WOMEN
Geneva, 21-22 June 1994

REPORT ON THE WORKSHOP

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The Workshop on Capacity Building for the Advancement of Women, organized within the framework of the preparatory activities for the Fourth World Conference on Women (Beijing, 4-15 September 1995), was held in Geneva from 21 to 22 June 1994.

2. The Workshop was organized by the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe and was made possible by contributions from the United States and the Federal Republic of Germany.

3. The Workshop was attended by participants from Albania, Belarus, Croatia, Czech Republic, Georgia, Hungary, Latvia, Poland, Romania, Russian Federation, Slovakia, Slovenia, The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, and Ukraine. Representatives of non-governmental organizations also attended.

II. OPENING SESSION

4. The Workshop was opened by Mrs. Dunja Pastizzi-Ferencic, Deputy Executive Secretary of the Economic Commission for Europe, who outlined the objectives and scope of the Workshop, including its main objective which was to discuss the most suitable forms of institutional support for activities related to the advancement of women in countries in transition. She elaborated on the past experience of the functioning of national machineries in many countries in transition. She stressed that the moment of crisis was also a moment of opportunity to propose innovative patterns which would secure the much needed institutional and financial support for the advancement of women.

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5. The Workshop was organized under four working sessions which are described below.

6. The Objective and training scope of the Workshop were to provide support for establishing and strengthening capacity building for the advancement of women in the countries in transition with a view to creating an enabling environment for growth and development.

7. The agenda was adopted (see Annex) and recommendations were approved by participants at the end of the Workshop. The discussions were led by two moderators. The Workshop was conducted in an interactive manner so as to ensure the maximum exchange of ideas and experiences.

III. DISCUSSION

WORKING SESSION ONE

8. During Working Session One, three main topics were discussed: (a) preparations for the Fourth World Conference on Women; (b) preparations for the High-level Regional Preparatory Meeting and (c) the role of non-governmental organizations and their involvement in the preparatory process for the Conference.

(a) Preparations for the Fourth World Conference on Women

9. Ms. Dorota Gieryez from the United Nations secretariat for the Fourth World Conference on Women, New York, briefed participants on preparations for the Conference at the international and regional levels. She stressed that the secretariat had been working on the premise that this Conference should be different from the previous ones and should be more focused on selected areas of special concern, as defined by the regional and global platforms for action. The Conference should be more oriented towards concrete activities at the national, regional and international levels aimed at the major practical improvement of the situation of women. Both women and men from Governments, parliaments, NGOs, professional associations, academic institutions and grass-roots organizations should get involved in the preparatory process, the Conference itself and the implementation of its results.

10. The elimination of discrimination against women and women's full integration into all spheres of life, including decision-making, was not only a basic human right of women, but a condition for the creation of just and participatory societies, based on principles of partnership, sharing and truly democratic relations at all levels, ranging from interpersonal to international. Women's unequal participation in some spheres, such as decision-making, deprived societies of women's unique contributions and made the democratic process incomplete.

11. The secretariat for the Conference attached special importance to the participation of countries in transition in the preparatory process and the Conference itself. It was considered particularly important for women from those countries to become a part of the European and global preparatory meetings and networks. They should use the momentum of the Conference to reflect on the situation in their own countries, to become involved on an equal basis with men in the reforms shaping the future of their countries; to put equality issues on the public agenda; and to ensure that

the transition process would not have a negative impact on the status of women. Some negative aspects of the situation of women had already been observed in the countries in transition, such as high unemployment rates and low participation in the decision-making bodies, in diplomacy, and in international cooperation. In spite of having one of the world's highest levels of education, the participation of women continued to be among the lowest in the world.

12. The secretariat for the Conference also saw the need for more direct contact, cooperation and input from the countries in transition in the future, at both the governmental and non-governmental levels. It was particularly important for those countries to create strong national preparatory committees for the Conference to involve in their work both women and men from a variety of political backgrounds, from all walks of life; to establish strong and lasting cooperation between such committees and NGOs, parliamentarians, experts in the rights of women, and others. Although some national committees had been created, the majority of the countries in transition had yet to establish them.

13. Another important aspect of the preparatory activities for the Conference related to the submission of national reports. Although the reports had been due by the end of May 1994, very few had been submitted by the countries in transition to the secretariat in New York as of mid-June 1994. The preparation of those reports was considered an important activity, which provided an opportunity for national self-reflection on the status of women and the organization and collection of data and information on progress achieved since the Nairobi Conference in 1985. The lack of reports from the region was of concern to the Conference secretariat.

14. The representative of the secretariat also expressed the hope that with the political change and democratization in the region its NGOs would be able to get involved in the preparatory process and bring their unique experience to its outcome.

(b) Preparations for the High-level Regional Preparatory Meeting

15. To prepare the Fourth World Conference on Women, which will be held in Beijing in 1995, the five United Nations regional commissions will organize, during 1994, High-level Meetings dealing with major regional aspects of action for Equality, Development and Peace, the general theme of the World Conference.

16. The United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UN/ECE), which comprises 54 member States stretching over 3 continents (including the Commonwealth of Independent States, North America, Turkey and Israel), will hold its High-level Meeting from 17-21 October 1994 in the Vienna International Centre under the heading: "Women in a changing world - call for action from an ECE perspective."

17. Delegations are expected to discuss the considerable impact of the economic and social changes in Europe on the role of women in the economy and their participation in the economic and social life in the region and individual countries.

18. The preparatory work undertaken by the ECE secretariat for the Vienna meeting will have to be financed by extrabudgetary funds. To date, 15 countries have announced contributions and more

pledges are expected to be made in the near future. Several member countries consider assisting countries in transition to make their participation possible. It will be the first multilateral event on women at a high governmental level ever held in the ECE region. A process of consultation and cooperation has been initiated by the ECE secretariat with national committees, other UN agencies, European institutions and non-governmental organizations competent in issues related to women.

19. The agenda for the High-level preparatory meeting will include such substantive issue as women's role in the economy, demographic and statistical trends, employment and entrepreneurship, women in the transition process, role of women in public life and governance.

20. The participants were provided with the draft paper on the expected outcome of the High-level regional preparatory meeting which included the statement of mission, global framework, seven major critical areas of concern matched by the seven strategic objectives which should lead to concrete actions at the regional, national and community levels.

(c) The role of Non-governmental Organizations and their activities for the Beijing Conference

21. Mrs. Sonia Heptonstall, Chairperson of the ECE/NGO Working Group and Mrs. Irene Hoskins, Chairperson of the Sub-Committee on the Status of Women, explained the role of NGOs and spoke of the good relations existing between the NGO/ECE Working Group and the ECE secretariat. A major task of the NGO/ECE Working Group was reaching out to all NGOs, not only those which had consultative status with ECOSOC. The NGOs' representatives said that the fundamental issue relating to the Fourth World Conference on Women was economy. Women constituted over fifty per cent of the world's population but made up the majority of the poor. Until this situation changed there could be no economic development for men and women without a change in the status of women. It was this factor that had launched the first World Conference on Women in 1975. The issue of human development remained the fundamental reason for the Fourth World Conference as it had been for the first. There was a close link between the Social Summit, whose concerns were poverty, employment and development, and the Fourth World Conference. It was not a question of men versus women, or women versus men, but men and women together to solve vital issues.

WORKING SESSION TWO

Presentation of country situations

22. During Working Session Two participants described briefly the situation in their own countries, the structure, function and activities of national machineries and national committees, the preparation of national reports and identification of critical areas of concern for action.

23. In the past, countries of central and eastern Europe and the former USSR had national machineries in accordance with the UN definition. They had dealt primarily with international cooperation. With the emergence of the newly independent States, however, there was an evident lack of such established mechanisms for the advancement of women. Some countries had established national preparatory committees for the Fourth World Conference on Women, which could take over the role of national machineries in the future. Most of the countries underlined the need for increasing international support.

24. Participants stressed the importance of establishing national machineries to coordinate women's activities within the countries in transition. Without prejudice to the individual right of every country to decide on the composition and placement of the national machinery within its political structure, it was felt that these national machineries should be financed from special allocations in the national budget. In some countries the members of the national committees were mostly men and it was necessary to find ways for women to interact with men on a basis of partnership.

25. Several delegates said that they had not yet established a national machinery or a national committee for the Beijing preparations, but some action had been started. It was underlined that national committees in many countries would not remain as permanent bodies, but they could easily be transferred into national mechanisms for the advancement of women.

26. The participants agreed on the necessity of setting up a data-base of all national machineries and committees, and of NGOs in order to establish interaction and communication among women in countries in transition. The need for statistical data and their diffusion was highlighted during the discussion. Many countries expressed their concern at the lack of adequate statistical data and indicators.

WORKING SESSION THREE

Exchange of experiences on the role of women in economic and public life

27. Working Session Three, which was moderated by Mrs. Ewa Ruminska-Zimny, examined the role of women in economic and public life.

28. The transition process had lead to some new job opportunities in the private sector, but at the same time there had been a considerable social cost in terms of lower income levels and living standards due to increased unemployment and the elimination of price subsidies and many social benefits which had been part of the socialist welfare system. Women´s share in the burden of transition was disproportionately high whilst their share in the emerging opportunities was low. there was a need to identify the most vulnerable women´s groups, in particular those living in poverty and to find ways to assist them, inter alia, through programmes of international assistance focused on women.

29. In the future there might be new job opportunities for women in small, medium and micro (family) enterprises, and in the services sector, in particular in banking, insurance and accounting.

30. In connection with the new job opportunities, education, leadership, training and orientation on legislative and political processes were important issues. Participation in public life also included voluntary activities at the community level which was equally important as participating in formal positions of public responsibility and public office. The two were closely interlinked. Public policy reflected the interests of all people in society and women's involvement in key decision-making positions was essential. The importance of women's participation in science and technology, mass media and communication, and in military and peace-keeping activities was also stressed.

31. A comparison was drawn between the countries in transition and the west European countries. Women in west European countries were also exposed to specific forms of discrimination such as the gender pay gap, unequal treatment in hiring, promotion and training in both the public and private sector, and under-representation in politics and in economic decision-making which is often referred to as the "glass-ceiling". The remark was made that in times of economic growth women's issues were included on the agenda of political parties, and legislation and measures tended to be generous, but in times of recession, women's problems were excluded from political and public discussion. Women's problems were society's problems. Therefore, women and men together in partnership had to solve them. Solidarity between women in west and central and east European countries was important.

32. During the general debate it was stressed that in most countries the participation of women at the parliamentary and governmental level was very low. Even in the diplomatic service the number was extremely low and women rarely achieved the level of chiefs of missions. Little had been done to improve the situation, such as the setting-up of government institutes which would establish specific quotas for women with participation in public life and governance. The urgent necessity to secure the appropriate training for women in order to improve their participation in public life was reiterated by several participants, including the training for economic governance under transition circumstances and legal literacy.

WORKING SESSION FOUR

Capacity Building for the Advancement of Women

33. During Working Session Four, capacity building for the advancement of women was thoroughly examined. While the full participation of women in the transition process was a fundamental precondition for its success, women encountered particular difficulties in the present political, economic and social environment of the countries in transition. Appropriate human capacity-building measures had to be promoted for women to enhance their capabilities. Countries would have to look at institutions, the legal framework, enforcement mechanisms, technical skills, and the basic knowledge of individuals regarding the advancement and integration of women into economic, political and social life in the countries in transition. In examining those aspects in individual countries, the participants indicated how this process could be further developed in an integrated manner through the institution building in each country.

34. The major points highlighted during the discussion are resumed in the conclusions and recommendations of the workshop reflecting the agreed priority areas for building up and strengthening of national capacities for the advancement of women.

IV. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

35. The Workshop reached major policy conclusions which will be considered by the High-level Regional Preparatory Meeting.

36. The Workshop stressed that the Fourth World Conference on Women, Call for Action: Equality, Development and Peace, should not be considered as an isolated phenomenon but rather as

the continuation of the global process aimed at major improvement of the situation of women worldwide through awareness-raising campaigns, dissemination of information and gender-desegregated data and broad discussion on the role of women in society. The results of the Conference should be fully implemented in practice and the process of implementation should start in Beijing, with the adoption of a Platform for Action.

37. Governments should use the preparatory process for the Beijing Conference to increase public awareness of position of women in society, in particular by highlighting and promoting the results of the national reports. The role of the national and international media is crucial to achieve this objective. An appropriate information strategy is required in order to promote a different image of women. Women are to be portrayed not as vulnerable, passive victims but as full citizens, active agents and beneficiaries of development.

38. Having equality de iure is not enough. Women should be able to exercise their rights de facto, to share power and to participate fully in all spheres of life. Therefore, women and men should be made aware of women's rights and responsibilities through proper training and legal literacy campaigns.

39. Partnership between men and women should be considered as one of the basic principles of the preparatory process. It should facilitate the creation of new, more positive and balanced interpersonal relations between men and women which are essential for the development of a truly democratic and participatory civic society. It was also stressed that without parity and partnership in all spheres of life, including decision-making, there would be no true democracy.

40. The elimination of all forms of discrimination against women and the promotion of equality in all fields of life are not only basic human rights of women, but also issues which are of importance to society as a whole. Only in a society which is just and free from violence can women make a full and distinct contribution to the social, economic, political and cultural development of their countries.

41. In order to strengthen national capacity for the advancement of women and to ensure an integrated approach to domestic and international issues, the need was expressed for the establishment of national coordinating committees and focal points. It was agreed that they should be called "equal opportunity machineries".

42. Equal opportunity machineries should coordinate women's activities at the national level and serve as focal points for international cooperation. They should be financed from special allocations in national budgets and should employ highly professional staff on a full-time basis.

43. Without prejudice to the individual right of every country to decide on the composition and placement of an equal opportunity machinery within its political structure, it was recommended that it should be placed at the highest governmental level, as an interministerial body with strong linkages to national parliaments, NGOs, research and academic institutes, professional associations and other groups representative of the civic society.

44. In those countries which had established national preparatory committees for the Beijing Conference such committees could be converted into equal opportunity machineries after the Conference.

45. The workshop emphasized the major contribution of NGOs to the advancement of women in the countries in transition. Thus, an effort should be made to publish national directories of NGOs. The preparation of such directories would serve as a good opportunity to raise the awareness of women's issues and the role of NGOs, including women's groups, in creating civic societies.

46. The workshop suggested the establishment of an international centre for NGOs in the region in cooperation with the United Nations Department for Public Information and other relevant bodies of the UN system. Such a centre should coordinate and facilitate contacts between NGOs and serve as a focal point for the exchange of information on on-going research projects and for the compilation of gender-related statistics. The centre should also assist those countries where such data are non-existent in establishing gender-segregated data base in accordance with the UN standards.

47. In order to support those non-governmental activities financial assistance and logistical support would be required.

48. The majority of participants expressed the view that the delegations to the Regional Preparatory Meeting in Vienna should be at the highest possible governmental level and should include the highest ranking women from the Government or the Parliament as well as a broad representation of experts on women's issues, including NGOs.

ANNEX

WORK PROGRAMME
(21-22 June 1994)

Tuesday, 21 June

9:30 Registration of participants

10:00 - 10:30 Opening session

- Objectives and training scope of the meeting

- Review of the provisional work programme and election of two moderators of the workshop.

10:30 - 13:00 Working Session 1:

- Information on the preparations for the Fourth World Conference on Women

- Information on the preparations for the High-level Regional Preparatory Meeting

15:00 - 18:00 Working Session 2:

- Presentation of country situations (activities of national committees, elaboration of national reports, identification of critical areas of concern for action)

Wednesday, 22 June

10:00 - 13:00 Working Session 3:

- Exchange of experiences on the role of women in economic and public life.

15:00 - 18:00 Working Session 4:

- Capacity Building for the Advancement of Women (establishment of women machinery, financial and human resources, network building, cooperation with non-governmental, academic and professional institutions)

Closing of the meeting

- Major policy conclusions to be considered for the expected outcome of the High-level Regional Preparatory Meeting

- Agreed priority areas for building up and strengthening of national capacities for the advancement of women.